1 Introduction

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Until recently anthropological interest in Pakistan has been dominated by a focus on the countryside. This is probably as it should be in a country which is predominantly agricultural. However, a growing number of Pakistanis live in cities both in Pakistan itself as well as overseas and very many more have some indirect experience of cities through contact with those who have lived there. Within Pakistan the rate of urbanisation has been rising dramatically, fuelled not only by natural growth and rural to urban migration, but by a massive influx of refugees. Millions of migrant Pakistanis are now also to be found residing overseas in British and Middle Eastern cities. But despite the fact that migration and urbanisation have thus become such a major part of Pakistani life, and although they have been the focus for a number of economic and demographic studies, the social and cultural consequences of these trends are less well understood. This book tries in part to rectify this.

But it is not just a book about Pakistani cities and migrants. It is also a book about how people respond to and deal with the large-scale forces shaping their society, forces for which their behaviour in a radically changing environment is partially responsible. Because some of the forces currently shaping Pakistani society are shared by many other developing countries – migration, ethnic tension, and urbanisation for example – the experiences of many Pakistanis are echoed in developing nations around the world. At the same time, however, they are uniquely moulded by Pakistan's particular culture and religion. Pakistan's claim on our attention is thus twofold. On the one hand, it is important for what it can teach us about the global significance of these forces and on the other, for what is distinctive about it: the particular configuration which these forces take and the ways in which they uniquely combine, as well as the way in which people's responses to them are rooted in Islam.

The contributors to this volume are ideally qualified to examine how ordinary people influence and are influenced by these processes. Most of them are anthropologists or sociologists whose research is characterised by extended fieldwork and an emphasis on the culture or way of life of the people studied. Their research thus provides a

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grass roots perspective on Pakistani society which complements existing studies of how these processes operate at a more general level. By using case studies the contributors are able not only to offer insights into how such large-scale processes interrelate with each other, but to provide clues as to what they mean and how they are interpreted by ordinary people.

This is not to say, however, that by offering a grass roots perspective the wider contemporary and historical contexts are of no interest or relevance here. As a discipline anthropology has increasingly come to realise the arbitrariness of a focus on a particular community and to recognise the necessity of going beyond this, not least because the horizons of the members of that community have themselves broadened. This is certainly the case in Pakistan where people are now more mobile both socially and geographically than ever before. Large-scale migration and massive urbanisation have exposed many Pakistanis to new ways of doing things and new ways of thinking about their society. Events throughout the Muslim world and its relationship to the West over the last decade have encouraged new ways of thinking about their religion, not only for Pakistan's predominantly Sunni population, but for its many minority Muslim sects as well. Pakistan is clearly a society experiencing massive change and those previously isolated from one another are now coming into contact.

In such circumstances it is easy to emphasise disjunction and transition, to emphasise the novel and the innovatory. We are led to ask questions about how Pakistan has changed, rather than about how it has remained the same. We ask questions about those who have left their home, rather than about those who have remained behind. We ask questions about how new capital or new skills can be harnessed, rather than about how old skills can be developed. By emphasising change and transformation, we can miss the fact that 'tradition' may remain significant, only transposed to new settings or used in new ways. As Rabinow (1975) reminds us, and as many of the chapters in this volume demonstrate, tradition is not necessarily opposed to modernity but may offer a means to integrate, create, and make meaningful new experiences.

Yet the kind of image which anthropologists have so far presented of Pakistan is of an essentially 'traditional' society, a society which is mainly rural, kin-based and governed largely by peasant or tribal values. Much of the existing anthropological research on Pakistan falls easily into the categories of 'tribe' or 'peasant' (see Ahmed and